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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0955
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3379
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0620
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1626
RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 0197
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 002072

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DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, INR/EAP

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [PINR](#) [ID](#)

SUBJECT: EMBITTERED EX-OFFICIAL ATTACKS--AND PRESIDENT
TAKES IT PERSONALLY

REF: JAKARTA 72

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Classified By: Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) On July 31, Zaenal Ma'arif was formally relieved of his duties as a parliamentarian and Deputy Speaker, ending a seven-month saga that began when his Reform Star Party (PBR) recalled him from parliament in January (Ref A). President Yudhoyono had sealed Zaenal's fate when he signed a declaration approving his removal. Zaenal responded by releasing alleged "evidence" that he claimed proved SBY had been married previously to a Philippine national. Yudhoyono reacted swiftly to the accusation -- which in fact had surfaced earlier -- by launching a defamation lawsuit against Zaenal. While most of our contacts questioned the veracity of the charges, the accusation and resulting presidential lawsuit have made a media splash. END SUMMARY.

FORMER DEPUTY SPEAKER TICKED OFF

¶2. (C) As reported in Ref A, the PBR party exercised its right to recall Zaenal from the House of Representatives (DPR) in January after Zaenal had systematically exasperated party leadership. According to PBR member and parliamentarian Ade Nasution, Zaenal forced PBR's hand by ignoring his constituents in Northern Sumatera, skimming party funds, and shining an unwelcome spotlight on the party by taking a second wife (Note: Polygamy is legal in this majority Islamic country, but nevertheless frowned upon by many. End Note).

¶3. (C) Zaenal reacted to the party's maneuver by digging in his heels and disputing PBR's recall prerogative, a tact that Ade Nasution told poloff was never legally tenable, as parties have the clear authority to recall members at any time. Zaenal also preyed on Speaker Laksono's job insecurities, arguing that if he were removed from his Deputy job, the entire DPR leadership could in theory be realigned

(Note: The 550 member DPR has one Speaker and three Deputy Speakers. The prestigious Deputy positions carry considerable clout and influence. End Note). Arief Budiman, an assistant to Laksono, told poloff that this argument for a time persuaded the Speaker to look for ways to possibly block Zaenal's removal.

¶4. (C) Ultimately, however, after a lengthy delay, Laksono determined that as Speaker he had no recourse but to process PBR's recall order. On May 31, the Speaker finally sent a letter to the Electoral Commission requesting Zaenal's removal. The Electoral Commission subsequently processed this request and then on July 19, the President made it official with Presidential decision no. 60/2007. The Presidential decision took effect on July 31.

¶5. (U) On July 31, Agung Laksono introduced Junisab Akbar as Zaenal's replacement in the DPR. Junisab, a PBR member from Northern Sumatera, will take Zaenal's regular DPR seat, but will not replace him as Deputy Speaker. Zaenal's Deputy Speaker position will remain vacant until the DPR settles on a mechanism to determine his replacement, a highly contentious issue that contacts doubted would be resolved anytime soon.

LITTLE CUCUMBER TAKES ON THE BIG DURIAN

¶6. (C) Shortly after the President signed the Presidential decision, Zaenal publicly announced that he had evidence that proved SBY had been married in the past to a Filipina and produced two children from the marriage, an allegation that first appeared during the 2004 campaign. Zaenal alleged the marriage took place before SBY entered the military academy in 1970. (Note: Only unmarried students are permitted to enroll in the academy. End Note). On July 30, Zaenal

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delivered the "evidence" -- which purportedly includes a video of a member of the alleged first wife's family testifying to the authenticity of the claim -- to the DPR, the Regional Representatives Council (DPD) and the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) and the Constitutional Court. According to media reports, Zaenal addressed reporters after he delivered his evidence and claimed that he had already received at least 11 death threats because of his actions, noting that "I'm just a cucumber compared to the President, who is the big durian."

ZAENAL'S MOTIVATION

¶7. (C) According to Ridwan Soeriyadi, a contact with the President's Democratic Party and a longtime acquaintance of SBY's, Zaenal first approached the President several weeks ago and pleaded with him to use his authority to block Zaenal's recall from the DPR. Ridwan told us that when SBY refused to do so, Zaenal then threatened to go public with "damaging information" about the President. According to Ridwan, SBY responded to the attempted blackmail by inviting him to release the information and intimating that he would not be bullied by Zaenal's tactics. Ridwan told poloff that he dismissed Zaenal's allegation as completely without merit and characterized it as part of a "black campaign" designed to weaken the president in advance of a 2009 re-election bid. Ridwan suspected that forces loyal to Golkar Advisory Board Chairman Surya Paloh had orchestrated the entire thing. Ridwan told us that when this allegation surfaced during the 2004 race for president, Ridwan had asked Yudhoyono whether it was true,

and Yudhoyono had simply asked Ridwan whether or not he trusted him. The implication to Ridwan was clear: Yudhoyono felt that if Ridwan believed in him as a candidate and a person, he would not need an answer to such a scurrilous accusation.

SBY COUNTERATTACKS

¶8. (U) On July 29, SBY filed a defamation suit against Zaenal Ma'arif. With the First Lady standing firmly by his side, the President filled out the paper work for the suit at the Jakarta Police Headquarters and later called Zaenal's accusations "character assassination." It is not clear when this suit will be decided by the court.

POLITICAL IMPACT

¶9. (C) The President has subsequently received mainly favorable press coverage, with many asserting that his actions were an example of model comportment in a democratic society. Contrasting SBY's behavior with the Suharto regime, several of our contacts have noted that this comparatively magnanimous tolerance for slander would have been unthinkable less than ten years ago (when people would have been imprisoned for insulting the president). Other contacts -- mostly on the opposition side -- have told us that they think SBY has overreacted to the charges and embarrassed himself in the process. In any case, these types of attacks and counter-attacks are likely to be replayed with increasing intensity as the 2009 presidential campaign draws nearer.

HUME